

*The Unintended Consequences of Conditional Cash Transfer Programs for Violence: Experimental and Survey Evidence from Mexico and the Americas**

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ABSTRACT

Because conditional cash transfer programs (CCTs) can address the deep roots of violence, many scholars and policymakers have assumed them to be an effective and innocuous tool to take on the issue. I argue that while CCTs may have positive economic effects, they can also trigger social discord, criminal predation, and political conflict and, in doing so, increase violence. To test this claim, I take advantage of the exogenous shock caused by the randomized expansion of Mexico's flagship CCT, PROGRESA/Oportunidades. I find that the experimental introduction of the program increased rather than decreased violence. Then, I analyze all the data compiled by LAPOP on the issue over the years. I find that, other things constant, Latin Americans are more exposed to violence and insecurity when they participate in CCTs than when they do not. These findings urge us to reconsider the effects of social programs on violence.

Keywords: CCT, social programs, homicides, PROGRESA, Mexico

Conditional Cash Transfer programs (CCTs) have become ubiquitous worldwide, attracting the attention of scholars across subfields. While their capacity to benefit the incumbent politically has triggered much debate over the last decade (De La O 2013; Imai et al. 2020; Díaz-Cayeros et al. 2016; Araújo 2021), there is a growing consensus that CCTs are effective in incentivizing human capital investments, reducing social inequality, and promoting political participation and inclusion (De Micheli 2018; Layton et al. 2017; Schober 2019; Morais de Sá e Silva 2017; Jenson and Nagels 2018; Molina-Millán et al. 2019). This evidence has led a growing body of scholars and policymakers to believe that as they tackle the deep roots of violence, CCTs may have downstream crime- and violence-reducing effects (Machado et al. 2018; Lance 2014; Dubois et al. 2012; Chioda

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